

## DNR RECOGNIZES CAMPGROUND HOSTS WITH PICNIC

by Michael Dhar

Posted: *September 17, 2004*

MOUNT VERNON - The DNR thanked 42 of its volunteers on Tuesday, September 14, handing out certificates of appreciation at a recognition picnic lunch.

Campground hosts from across the state converged on Palisades-Kepler State Park outside Mount Vernon for a recognition picnic. About 20 volunteers arrived early on Monday night for dinner and a campfire get-together.

"You give so much and do so much," Diane Ford-Shivvers, a DNR assistant division administrator for conservation and recreation, told the hosts. "You put Band-Aids on ouchies, you act as the face of the park. You are our spokespeople and advocates. You are our most important volunteers."

Campground hosts stay on state park and recreation area campgrounds during the busy summer camping season. They act as caretakers, information guides and all-around laborers. They receive free camping, but collect no other compensation for their work. Hosts are often retired couples with a lifelong love of camping.

One couple, Marvel and Tom Griffey, have hosted at Walnut Woods State Park for 16 years. They received a set of Iowa Quarters in recognition of their long term of service.

"I just love the park," said Tom Griffey. "My wife and I both love to camp, and we've got a good ranger. That's important."

Across the state, over 100 people volunteered as campground hosts this year, including the 42 that attended Tuesday's celebration. They put in more than 7,000 hours, contributing an estimated \$100,000 worth of labor to the state (according to the Independent Sector).

Tasks taken on by campground hosts include mowing lawns, cleaning bathrooms, reporting rule violations and giving advice to visitors.

"Our park is a very quiet secluded sort of park," said Carol Barnes, who hosts at Pilot Knob State Park with her husband, Al. "There's a lot of bird watching. We've become birders because we get so many questions."

The recognition picnic featured speeches by various DNR staff, including park managers and rangers who benefit from their hosts' work ethic. Bob Schierbaum, DNR southwest state park district supervisor, gave a presentation and showed a video covering the history of Civilian Conservation Corps work in Iowa's parks.

Kevin Szcodronski, head of the DNR parks bureau, talked about the "Iowa Parks 2020" initiative, a plan to reinvigorate Iowa's state parks by their 100th anniversary in the year 2020. He also engaged in a spirited discussion with the audience over plans to implement a reservation system in Iowa's state park campgrounds

